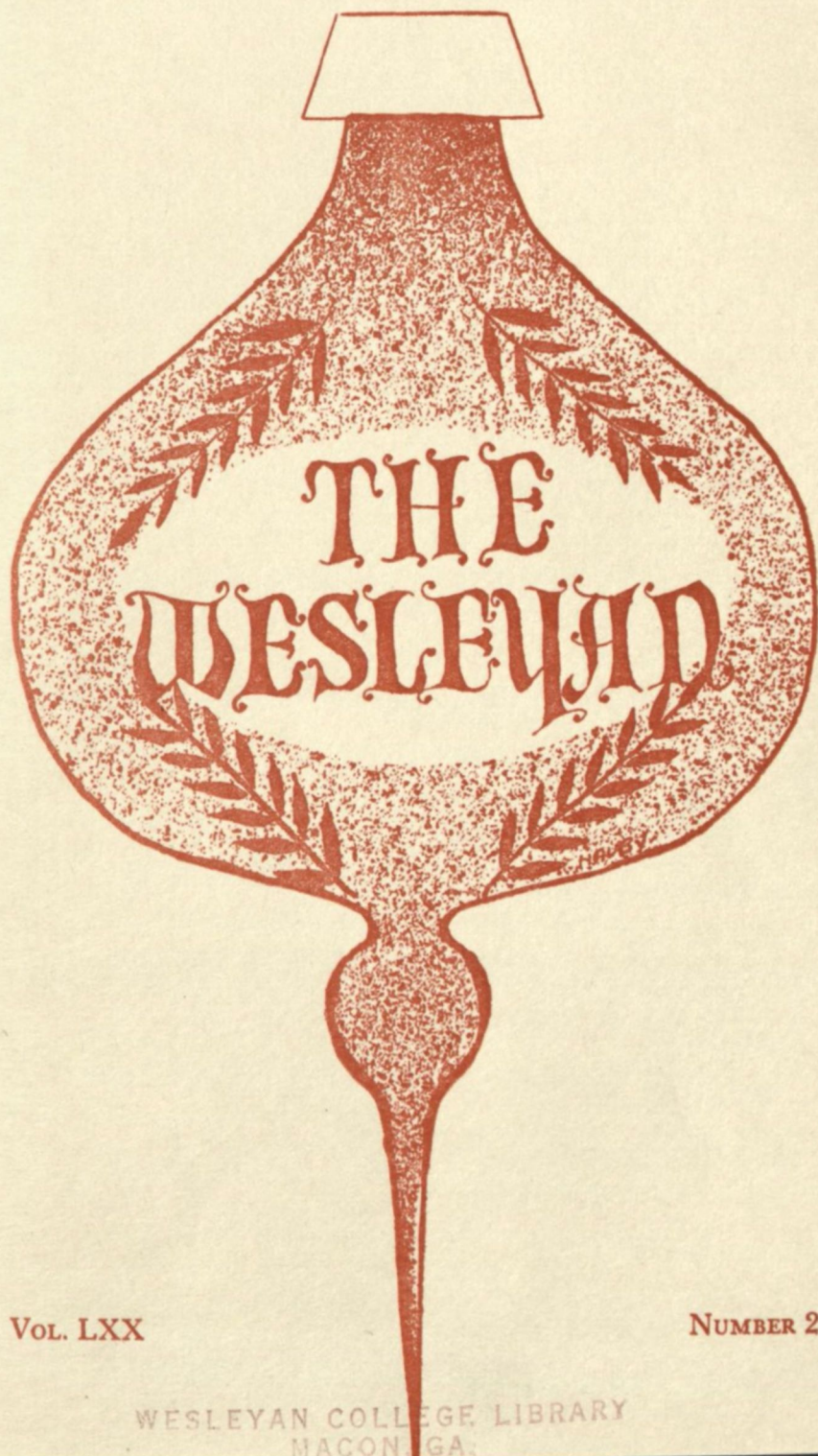


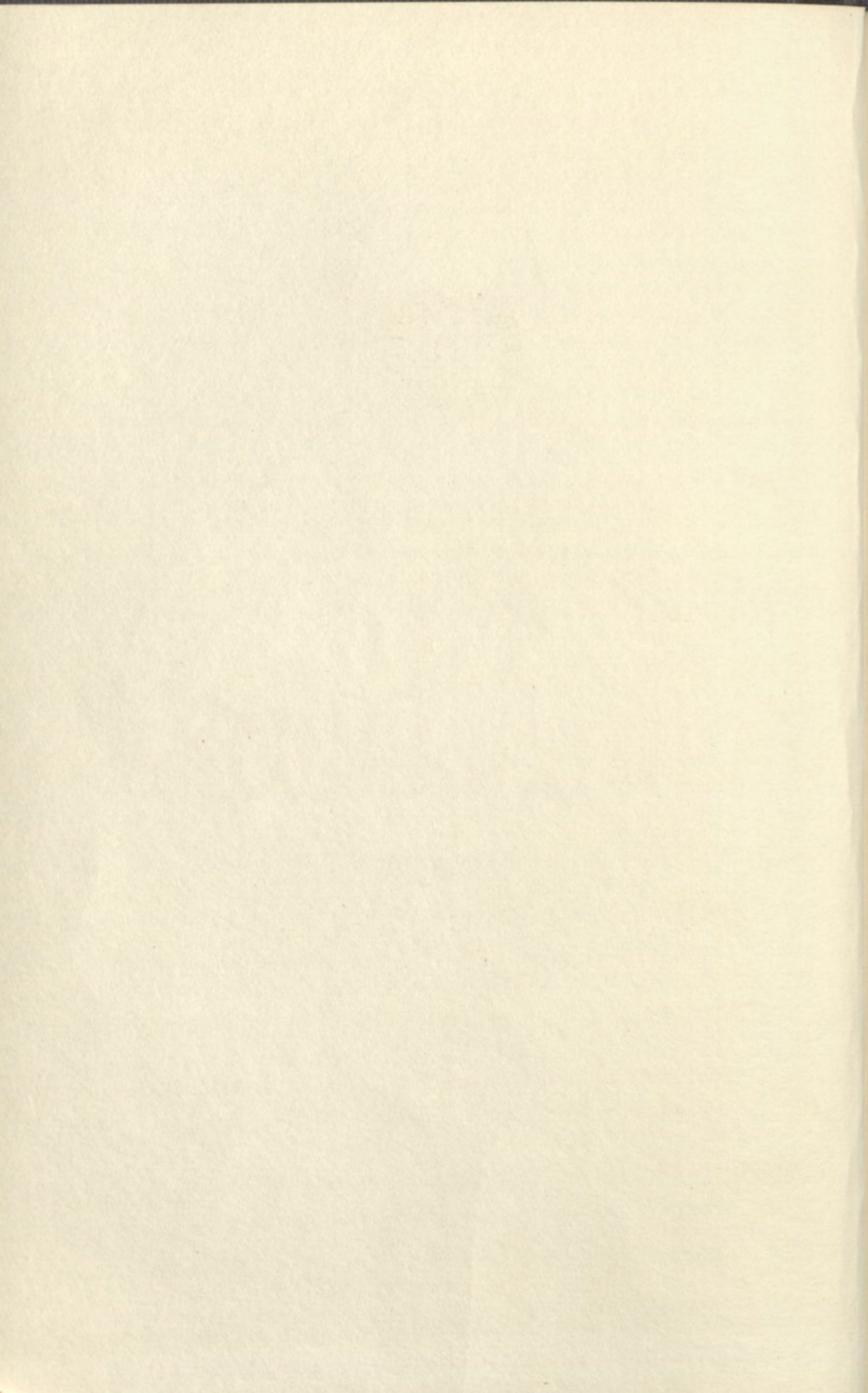
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# THE WESLEYAN

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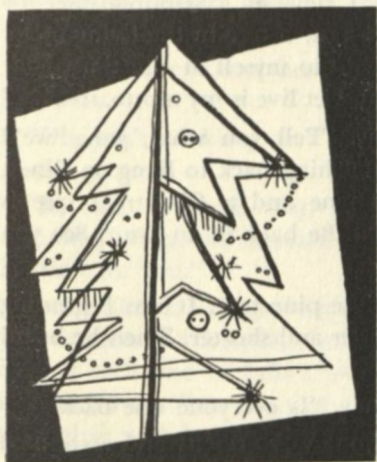
# How the Little Pine Tree Became a Christmas Tree

By MADGE HILL

The little pine tree stood in snow up to its first branch and let a tear trickle unashamedly down its trunk. A second tear followed the first and then a third and a fourth until soon the whole frame of the pine tree was shaking with huge sobs.

"What's the matter with yoooooooo?" softly asked the Lady in the Wind.

"Oh, Lady in the Wind," cried the little pine tree, "I want to be a Christmas tree! All my brothers and sisters were cut down weeks ago to be sent to the city. They'll be Christmas trees and I won't." And the little pine tree began to cry again.



"Hush, yooooooooou," said the Lady Wind, "you're too small this year to be a Christmas tree but next year when the woodchoppers come you will have grown and then you'll be sent to the city."

"Oh, no," cried the little pine tree. "See, they cut down all the trees around me this year. They won't be back for years and by that time I'll be too big." And this time the little pine tree broke down and cried and cried.

"Be stillllllll and let me think," said the Lady in the Wind. And all that day as she raced through the forest weaving in and out of tree tops and over and under the bushes she thought. At nightfall she was back. "I'll tell you what I've done," she called, "I've told the animals in the forest. Maybe they'll help you." And away she went to bang shut Farmer Brown's barn door and scatter Widow Jones's washing all over the yard.

A few hours later the little pine tree looked up and saw Johnny Bear staring at him with one eye shut. "Hummmmmmm," said Johnny. "So you want to be a Christmas tree? Hope you know you got me up from my winter's nap. Don't worry though, I don't sleep so well in winter anyway. I don't know much about this Christmas tree business but you stay right here and I'll bring Penny Possum and Sonny Skunk and Benny Beaver. We'll think of something."

"Oh," thought the little pine tree, "soon I'll be a Christmas tree." And he gave a gay shake of his branches and sat down to wait.

He didn't have long to wait for soon Johnny was back and with him came all the animal children of the forest. Johnny took immediate charge of the situation and soon became self-appointed director.



"Gang, this is the problem. This pine tree wants to be a Christmas tree and we're here to help him do it. Any suggestions?"

There was a long silence while the animals walked slowly around the tree. "I saw a Christmas tree once," said Sammy Squirrel shyly. "It was the time I found those acorns in Mr. Fellow's barn."

"You've seen one," shouted Johnny,, "why didn't you say so? What did it look like? Speak up, man!"

"You didn't ask me," answered Sammy. "It was pretty, all bright and cheerful. Can't remember much about it. Had acorns on my mind at the time. Do remember that it had things dangling all over it, though."

"You're a fine help," said Johnny. "Anybody else seen a Christmas tree before?"

"Sammy's right," spoke up Betty Bee. "I flew in a window once by mistake and before I could find my way out I saw a tree in the living room. It had candy all over it. You know, I thought to myself at the time, Now that's a funny place to have a tree, but live and let live is my motto, so . . ."

"Thank you, Betty," interrupted Johnny. "Tell you what, gang, we'll divide up in two's. Each pair is to bring something back to hang on Piney, here. Seems all the difference between a pine and a Christmas tree is whether it has things hanging over it or not. Be back in an hour. See you then."

The next hour was a long one for the little pine tree. It was beginning to get dark and his courage was getting shorter and shorter. Then he heard the animals returning.

"Here we are little pine tree," said Johnny. "Is everyone else back?"

A count of noses soon proved that everyone was present and accounted for.

"We've got something, Johnny, we've got something," shouted Robert Rabbit and Sammy Squirrel. And amid "oh's" and "ah's" the two little animals held up a long string of bright red and brown strings of beads.

"Shucks, weren't nothing," said a pleased Robert Rabbit. "Sammy and I remembered that old holly tree that grows down in Farmer Allen's pasture. We gathered some of the berries and Sammy gave up some of his acorns, then all we had to do was to string them. Three red berries and one acorn, three red berries and one acorn, that's all there was to it."

"Wonderful," cried Betty Bee, "but won't you get hungry this winter, Sammy? You know how much you like acorns."

"Ah, gee, I'm getting too fat anyway," said a red-faced Sammy.

"Hang it on me, hang it on me quick" cried the little pine tree.

So Sonny Skunk climbed on the back of Robert Rabbit and Benny Beaver climbed on Sonny's back and Betty Bee took one end in her mouth and flew around and around the little pine tree. When she flew around the bottom branch the other animals stood back and looked at the result. Every branch of the little pine tree had red holly berries and brown acorns on it.



"How do I look?" cried the little pine tree.

"Bea-u-ti-ful," breathed Penny Possum, "just beautiful. Now look what Johnny and I brought."

She then put her hands in her pocket and brought out a box half full of peppermint drops and half full of peppermint canes. "The canes are mine and the drops are Johnny's. We got them for not missing a single day of school last month. But how in the world will we ever get the drops on the tree?"

"I know," cried Sally Spider, "we'll lick them and paste them on!"

What fun the animals had pasting the peppermint drops on the little pine tree. They even let him lick a few before they put them on his limbs.

"Now, for our surprise," said Sally Spider. "We couldn't find anything to hang on the tree so Sonny Skunk and I decided to make our decorations. I'm going to spin webs all over the pine tree if he'll stand still long enough."

Benny Beaver lifted her up to the top branch and she began spinning her webs.

"Oh, you're tickling me!" cried the little pine tree bending his branches to the ground.

"Be still or you'll ruin my web," retorted Sally and went right on spinning. When she finished she slid to the ground and said, "Now Sonny, it's time for you."

Sonny Skunk brought out a big box and lifted the lid. "Gang, I want you to meet my friends, the Lightning Bug family. They've agreed to sit behind each one of Sally's webs so the little pine tree will have light on it." And away flew the tiny bugs to sit behind the webs. Soon the forest was aglow with hundreds of tiny twinkling lights.

"Oh," sighed the little pine tree. "I'm so happy. Thank you so much for—"

"Not so fast there," said Benny Beaver, "here's our surprise. Freddy Fish couldn't come, but he sent the prettiest pebbles he could find at the bottom of the pond. I made a snow ball and stuck the pebbles in them. See, just the thing to go on the very top branch. Bend down and I'll put it on you."

"You left me out," said a voice from above. The animals looked up to see Molly Mapletree standing near by. "I can never be a Christmas tree but I want the little pine tree to be extra beautiful, so hold tight little lightning bugs, I'm going to send snow down." And with that she gently shook her branches and snow flakes came tumbling down to land on the little pine tree.

For a while all the animals could do was to sit and look.

"Gosh," said Benny Beaver, "I didn't know anything in the world could be that pretty."

"Me either," sighed Betty Bee, "and to think we did it all ourselves. Reminds me of the time—"



"That's enough," said Johnny, "just goes to show what people can do when they all work together."

"What's the date?" asked Penny Possum. "Let's come back next year and have us another Christmas tree."

"It's Dec. 24, and do you think you all would come back next year?" asked the little pine tree.

"Wil we?" shouted the animals. "You bet we will!"

"Gooooo home, little animals. It's getting late," whispered the Lady in the Wind and all the animals hurried through the forest to their homes.

"Happy, little pine tree?" asked the Lady in the Wind.

"Oh, yes, I'm about the happiest—" but the little pine tree was fast asleep.

And that's the story of how the little pine tree became the most beautiful Christmas tree in the whole wide world.

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## Open Letter to the People

So you think there's not a Santa Claus? Well, let me tell you, there certainly is. That's me—Santa O. Claus. (The O's for an old family name.) Address, North Pole.

Lots of people have a mistaken idea about me, though. Guess they think I'm big, fat, and always wear a red suit and hat trimmed in white fur. Reckon they think I laugh all the time, too. 'Tain't so. Mind you, I'm not trying to disillusion kids or warp their precious little personalities. I'm not for breaking up the Christmas Spirit, either. I just think you folks ought to know the truth.

The first part's true. I am fat. My wife's forever nagging me about my weight, but I always say, "Now, Mamma, you know a skinny Santa would go over with kids like a blue fire engine!"

As far as that red suit business goes, it's just for the holiday season that I wear it. Personally, I hate the thing and it never has fit right, but what would all the little tykes think if I delivered their presents wearing a pin-striped business suit? Yeah, you know. I'd get a cold shoulder from them on out. Besides, people would probably get me mixed up with Monty Wooley.

I really don't laugh all the time. If I did my wife would have me put away. Ladies, how would you like to have a husband who laughed continuously? You'd divorce him after a week or so. Well, my wife's human and so am I.



I have headaches, just like you. Plenty of 'em, too. You've got to remember I have a big job every year. You hear about those 'busy little elves' that help me. Well, they aren't always so busy. Why, if I didn't stand over them half the time, darned if they wouldn't lay down on the job. They can't seem to get it into their thick little skulls that we have a deadline to meet. Every year it's the same thing. Can't fire them, though. They're the only people I know besides myself who are crazy enough to stay up here in this climate.

The reindeer are getting temperamental. Mamma (my wife) just spoils them to death. They practically run this household. One Christmas, back in 1877, I think it was, they just decided they wouldn't make the regular run. The runners on the sled made it pretty well, but that Sahara Desert was too much for those reindeer. They haven't tried that trick again. They still love to run off and leave me while I'm going down chimneys—the little devils!

I guess the worst thing of all is that ENORMOUS bunch of letter I get from children every year. Have you ever tried to read 500,000,000 letters in two weeks? Well, don't. You'll lose your eyesight. I assume they still have schools for the kiddies, but you'd never believe it from the looks of some of those letter. Looks as though they'd know Claus is spelled C-l-a-u-s and not C-l-a-w-s by now. And they wonder why they don't get what they asked for!

In spite of it all, I keep going, year after year. Don't get me wrong, I love Christmas. It's just that you gotta gripe to somebody. Just remember, I'm real; okay and I'll be back this year. One more word. How about cleaning your chimneys a little before the 24th? This business of making a new suit every year does get tiresome.

Regards,  
S. O. CLAUS

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## The First Christmas

*A hundred stars twinkled in a heaven of fir-scented green.*

*Two round, blue eyes, raised in childhood's wonder,*

*Beheld the cone of multicolored light.*

*A fat, pink face turned rapt attention on a rosy sphere,*

*A new red ball.*

*A tiny, dimpled hand reached out*

*To hold closely a world of Christmas joy.*

*Shrill laughter pealed a happy carol,*

*For in the heart of a child was found the reality of Christmas Day.*

—Jean Thrasher



# A Home for Christmas

By SARA THURSTON

Libby took another bite of the apple and pulled the blankets around her legs more snugly. She should go pull the window down, but that was a lot of trouble, and besides, she had only four more pages of history to read. Yes, only four more pages and then no more homework, no more themes, no more college. She'd be through, and she's be going home, home for Christmas. Oh, she couldn't wait. This time tomorrow night she'd be putting the last things in her suitcase, and this time night after tomorrow, she'd be getting off the train and hugging Mother, Dad, Judy, and Aunt Guinn, and Little Rob. And the next night she'd be at the Saint Nick dance with Hugh, and the night after that, tying up packages with red and green paper and . . .

Oh, if time would only hurry. She looked out of the window into the night at the trees swaying in the cold wind. She smiled and pulled the blankets higher. Maybe it was snowing there. Mother had written it had snowed a little Tuesday morning and maybe when she got home she would find everything covered with a blanket of white—like two Christmases ago. And then the crowd would go skiing or get Howard's sled. She could almost hear them shouting now, running in the snow, and the bells on Howard's sled tinkling. What fun the crowd would have. Of course, there's be dances and parties and teas, too, and maybe Shelby Cook would throw another New Year's Eve party. Oh, Christmas this year was going to be wonderful. And this time tomorrow night. . .

She stopped. Rose . . . What was she going to do about Rose? No, don't think about that now. But she had to. She'd have to decide now. She couldn't keep putting it off. Rose—was she going to ask Rose to go home with her for Christmas? She didn't know. It was so confusing. She wanted to ask her and, yet, something held her back. She saw Rose now—a tall, homely girl, smiling quietly as she always did. Her friend. No, she couldn't stand to think of Rose having to spend Christmas in an empty college. An empty college—with no Christmas tree, no carols, no parties. Rose, with no place to spend Christmas, no home and no one who cared—only Christmas in an empty college!

Yes, ask her. Ask Rose to go home with her. That's what she'd do. She'd ask her tonight, and then Rose would have songs, laughter, a tree, a home—and Christmas. A white Christmas, too, if it were snowing at home now. Rose'd never seen snow before. Yes, she'd ask her. Mother wouldn't mind. And they'd ride home together on the train, and later they'd decorate the tree and sing carols, and then she'd take Rose to the parties with the crowd, and the crowd would . . . Libby stopped. The crowd—Mary Lou, Diane, and Lois. The parties, the dances, the teas—the crowd. The crowd and Rose. . . And then the old feeling crept over her again. The feeling she hated to admit that she had. A tall, shabby girl with an ugly—yes, an ugly face, and a crowd of gay dancing people.



No. She couldn't. It'd never do. The crowd. What would they think when she said, Mary Lou, this is Rose—Rose Callaway." Mary Lou would look her over and smile politely—maybe with sympathy, and return to the dance floor. Yes, and she'd give Diane a funny look and later she'd say something to Libby very carefully. She could hear Mary Lou now. "Libby, who—who is *she*? I mean, well, she's so different. Not like you at all. Are you doing it for the "Y" or something?"

And then Libby would swallow and try to say, loyally, "She's my friend." But could she? Or would she do as she had done this year at college, look embarrassed and say something about feeling sorry for people?

Funny thing, having a friend and then making excuses for her. It was funny, because she and Rose were almost best friends, but she wouldn't let anyone know it. Ashamed, yes. The questions, what will people think? What will they say? Yes, those questions that governed her every move. Silly, yes—but true. What will they think? That question had popped in her mind the day she had met Rose.

That day—it had been only three months ago. She'd been practicing her violin in the practice room when a tall, dark girl with a thin face came in. She just stood there a minute, her long, bony arms hanging awkwardly from her thin shoulders and her serious, sad eyes studying hers. Yes, Libby had recognized her—a transfer, a sophomore, too. And then the girl had spoken shyly, almost in a whisper:

"I'm glad you play, too."

And then they'd talked, about music. She was a stringy-haired girl with glasses that needed straightening and a gray sweater that was raveled at the elbow. She talked sort of funny and lots of times she made grammatical errors. Yet, there was something fascinating about her—about her shy eagerness, and about the way her face lit up when she talked of music. And then she'd left and had come back carrying an old viola.

"I thought maybe, if you had time, we might play a little. Do you know Massent's 'Elegy'?"

And then they'd played together and their music had blended. Rose seemed to feel her music more deeply than any girl Libby had ever known.

And as they played together, Libby felt that here at last was a friend who understood and loved music as she. And that day, Libby thought how much she wanted to be friends with this girl, this homely shabby girl—to have at last a friend with whom she could share her music. A friend who, feeling the same way as she, wouldn't laugh—as Doris and Virginia did, and say, "Honestly, Libby, do you have to brood around about your music all the time?" "You surely waste a lot of time in those practice rooms. You haven't been out to dinner with Clair and me all week." "For heaven's sake, Libby, don't be a drudge. Knock off with that silly practicing and act normal! Fred is bringing a darling KA down tonight and I want you to . . ." No, a friend who'd understand—to whom she could be her true self, and not have to pretend. Maybe this girl . . .

And so they'd become friends, close friends, playing their violin and



viola together after supper each night and sharing their music. She'd never heard anything so beautiful as Rose's playing "Traumerai" on her viola. It was the warmth and feeling she put in it. She'd never forget either the afternoon by the lake when Rose had told her about her father. Her father, who'd killed her mother in a rage, and who now was in an asylum. Yes, leaving Rose with no home—no family—and a life ahead of hardship and hard work. It was that afternoon that Libby had begun to admire Rose even more.

And yet, as much as she liked Rose, Libby had a funny feeling about her. She was always embarrassed when Virginia or Doris or the third floor crowd found them together. And when Virginia had asked her who in the world that poor girl was, she'd replied, "Oh, she's a transfer. Asked me to help her with her music, and I can't get out of it. Poor thing. I surely feel sorry for her."

And always she'd made excuses for Rose and was ashamed for anyone to know they were friends because Rose wasn't one of the crowd. Rose didn't go with any fraternity boys, and she always wore that tackie, worn-out gray coat with the lining hanging out. Ashamed yes, because Rose was a shabby, ugly-looking girl, a girl who was a nobody. A little afraid, too, that the crowd would drop her, if Rose Callaway were her friend. And so she had to hide Rose, as she had hidden her music, from the crowd. The crowd that for some strange reason meant so much to her. Oh, the third floor crowd had such fun—going to rush parties, going out to dinner, dating the richest boys from Graham. And yet, Libby didn't really care for all of this. It was music that mattered, but she couldn't let them know. And always the hammering thought: "What will people think?" She was different, really, but she could not let them know it. She was sick of hiding things. Sick of being a false person, but afraid not to be.

And now, Christmas. What was she going to do? The other day Rose had told her she wouldn't be going home Christmas. She had no home—her father in the asylum and her mother dead by his hands. No home, only an empty school to spend Christmas in. An empty, lifeless school—when everywhere else there'd be singing, bright lights, turkey dinners, family reunions, gifts, squeals of joy—Christmas.

She wanted to ask Rose to spend Christmas with her—to sing and to laugh. Now she had to decide—to be a friend or not. The true test, yes. She wanted her to go—wanted Rose to be happy. She wanted to give her a real Christmas. She and Rose—they were friends.

But what would third floor think? What would Doris and Virginia say when they heard whom she was taking home."

"Rose Callaway! Have you ever heard of such a thing?" Yes, she could see their nudges and feel their mocking eyes, and what explanation would she make. They'd laugh at her and talk behind her back, and then after Christmas when she came back, why, she wouldn't be one of them any more.

No. She wouldn't take Rose. Rose could look after herself. After all,



Libby wasn't like Rose, and she had other things to think about—the parties, the Kappa Sig's, the new cocktail dress, the crowd. After all, who was *she* to take in Rose. She certainly couldn't look after every poor unfortunate that came along. And besides, the crowd at home—Mary Lou, Diane, Lois—Rose wouldn't mix at all with them. Why, she'd feel out of place. Wouldn't know even how to play bridge. Why, the poor girl would be embarrassed! What was she thinking of to even entertain the idea of taking Rose home? She could see Rose stammering and coming to a party in that hideous green dress that her aunt had given her. She could see Mary Lou's sympathetic, but cold, eyes. She could feel her own face getting red when Rose made some of those awful grammatical errors. She could see the ugly face and the . . .

Oh, no. This was all wrong. She didn't feel this way. Oh, Rose, forgive. She hadn't meant it. Rose was her friend.

What was she going to do?

Libby got out of bed and crossed the room, restlessly taking another apple from the shelf.

Christmas. This time soon, she'd be home. Home for Christmas.

And then off in the distance she heard something—voices. What was it? . . . "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see . . ." Libby ran to the window. The senior class. Yes, caroling. And louder, "Above thy deep and dreamless sleep. . ." "thy deep and dreamless sleep. . ." And lights began to flicker. Candles. Outside the window—the seniors. They were almost under her window now. "Yet in thy dark stream shineth. . ." The faces lifted up. The candles flickered. Christmas. And then they moved on, and softly, "The hopes and fears of all thy years are met in Thee tonight."

Libby watched them disappear. Christmas. A time to give, to love, to make others happy—because of Him. Christmas, a time to rededicate. Christmas—a time to share—yes, share.

She would! Of course, she would! She'd share her home—her Christmas with Rose. She'd take a stand. She didn't care. She hated snobs and littleness. She'd ask Rose, and she'd be proud of her. She'd open her home to her, and her heart. The crowd? What of them? It didn't really matter. All that mattered was Rose and her Christmas.

Yes, she'd call her mother to make sure it was all right. She'd ask Rose—she couldn't wait to see the tired, sad face light up in joy and she couldn't wait for Rose to taste Mother's cranberry sauce or see the snow or help trim the tree. Oh, Christmas!

She left the room and went into the phone booth. With excited fingers she put in her nickel.

"Operator . . . yes, 23094. I want to call collect. Yes. Mrs. John Raymond, Waller, North Carolina . . . 659. Yes."

She couldn't wait. Mother wouldn't mind, she knew, and then she'd go find Rose and . . .



There was a tap on the phone booth door. Doris, with her new low-necked dress.

"Libby?"

"Wait a sec, Doris."

"Libby, open the door."

"Well, hurry, I'm calling home. . . ."

"O.K. Listen, there are three darling Kappa Sig's in the date office. Jack brought them. Can you come? Virginia and Elizabeth are going, too. Listen, Lib, yours is a dream. His father is D. W. Mason, *only* the richest attorney in Bingham. And the car, a new green Lincoln. Hurry, can't you?" The door closed.

"Operator . . ." There was a pause. "Operator, cancel that call please. No, don't bother . . . cancel it."

The receiver clicked.

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## The Christmas Present

By DORIS CHITWOOD

"Jane, I've been lying here thinking; what do you want for Christmas? I can't think of a thing that I really want except that new set of golf clubs that I told you I saw down town. Course, I'd like to have clothes and stuff like that, but I can't think of anything special that I'd really and truly like to have. Mom said I could have a new fur coat if I wanted it, but golly, I'm not mad for one like most of the girls around here. Oh well, I'll think of something, I guess, before Christmas because just lying here thinking isn't getting my parallel reading in the library read," said Jane, as she bounced up and grabbed her green and yellow wool plaid coat and books. "Well, see ya, Barb. Gotta hit the books. Guess I'll be back around 9:30." And the door slammed behind Jane Martin, a rather out-of-doors type girl, with a heart of pure gold. Her blond wavy hair, kind of pushed back in a carefree sort of way and her deep brown eyes, always twinkling, along with her rosy cheeks gave a glow to her friendly face.

"I'm kinda glad Jane is gone. This is the kind of night I like to be alone, so I can do a little dreaming and thinking," sighed Barb, as she looked heavy-eyed out of their third floor window. The clouds outside were dark and it looked as if it might snow. From her window she saw how barren the ground looked, a kind of cold stillness waiting for the snow. "O-o-o-o, it makes me shiver to even look out," she remarked as she tossed back her blue-black hair and snuggled her chilled feet into her pink wooly blanket at the foot of the bed. Settling down with her lit. book in her hands she found her place and began reading; reading more and more slowly, until finally her thoughts had drifted far off. Her eyes wandered out of the window with her thoughts.



"I wonder what Mark is doing tonight," thought Barb. "In his letter today, he said he did a lot of thinking about 'us' at night. He said I was the only one in the world that he really loved, since he's an orphan. That gives me such a warm, good feeling inside, as if I were really needed by someone, someone special. His letter was so strong though, so unlike Mark, his speaking of when he was a child and how he used to like to help the kids he played with when they got into trouble. Then he dropped right off into the part about if anything should happen to him over there, in Korea, how I would receive the telegram from the War Department. Golly, I don't even like to think about it."

Barb seemed to be awakened from her deep thoughts by the tinkle of small drops of ice on her window pane. It was snowing and sleeting now and it looked like a fairy land with the dainty white flakes against the black sky, spattered with dark grey clouds. "Funny, the soft snow seems to be caressing the troubles of earth with its white blanket, kind of apropos of my thoughts . . ."

Barb glanced at her watch. "Gosh, it's 9:00! I've just been sitting here thinking for over an hour. I've got to get to work!" Barb looked back at her book, and began reading once more, this time with more ease and contentment.

The door burst open and in came Jane, her tousled hair wet from the melted snow. Whe-e-e-e, it's snowing hard, Barb. That means we can go skating tomorrow. What fun! Say, by the way, Barb, the girl at the desk told me to tell you that you have a telegram in the office and for you to come over and get it. Wonder who it's from?"

Anxiety swept across Barb's pale face. She leaped from the bed, grabbed Jane's still damp coat and rushed out of the room. It seemed as though she didn't hit a step, she just flew down them. As she flung open the door a tremendous gust of snow hit her in face, almost blinding her. Running madly through the icy night, her thoughts and the excitement seemed to rush her onward. When she arrived at the office she grabbed the telegram with shaky hands and tore it open. "WILL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS STOP MEET ME THE 23RD AT THE AIRPORT AT 2:45 P.M. LOVE, MARK." Barb flopped in the big brown leather chair behind her, relieved. "Why Barbara Evans, you look ill. It's so cold outside and your face is all hot and flushed," remarked the plump middle-aged house-mother. "Yes'm, I guess I am," sighed Barb.

As Barb wandered back outside, she noticed that it had almost stopped snowing and as she looked up she saw one tiny star peeping through the thin gray clouds.

Opening the door to her room, she spied Jane flopped across the bed with her nose nuzzled in the biology book, and on the radio was playing "I'll Be Home for Christmas". "Hey Jane, you know you asked me what I wanted for Christmas earlier this evening? Well, I've just received it—the most wonderful Christmas present I could ever hope for."



# Conversation

By FRANCES DREW

Mommy, why do I have to go to bed so early? Can't I stay up to see Santa Claus?

No, darling, Santa doesn't come to see little boys that stay awake on Christmas Eve.

But, Mommy, can't I even tell him what I want?

You told him in your letter, dear.

Yes, but I just thought of something else.

Well, Santa has a way of knowing what little boys like, even if they don't write him about it.

He does? Mommy, why does Santa bring toys to little boys?

Because he likes little boys. But we mustn't forget little girls—Santa also likes them, you know.

Why does he bring presents only once a year?

Well, Christmas comes only once a year, and he has to spend all the rest of the year making the toys.

He does? Mommy, why is it called "Christmas", instead of "Santa Claus Day"?

Well, that is because there was a day called "Christmas" long before anyone ever heard of Santa Claus.

Why? Who is Santa Claus?

Santa Claus was a good man who gave presents to the poor many, many years ago. But his name wasn't Santa Claus. It was really "St. Nicholas". He was the first Santa.

He was? Where did we get Christmas, Mommy?

Well, darling, about two thousand years ago, there was a little baby born whom people called the Christ Child.

Oh, I know him, Mommy.

Of course you do. Remember how there was a big, bright star that shone in the sky and showed people where He was?

Yes, Mommy, but why?

You remember that I told you that God made you and He made me?

Yes, Mommy.

Well, God made all the other people too; and 'way back when the Christ Child was born, the people in the world were not very good. And God was displeased with them, such as I am when you don't wash your face and hands before meals.

Did God spank the people like you do me?

No, dear, He didn't: There were too many of them, and besides, it wouldn't have helped them much. You see, they had displeased God too much and the only way they could make up with Him was for Him to



send someone from Heaven to take their punishment.

Why, Mommy?

When you are older, dear, you'll understand better. But it is something like when you have been naughty and need a spanking; even though you have displeased me greatly and need a spanking, I still love you and want you to be good. And though I spank you, I know it makes me suffer more than you.

You do?

Yes, dear. And that's the way God felt, so He sent His only Son, whom He loved just ever so much, to earth, to make up to Him for the naughty people.

Who was His son, Mommy?

His son was the Christ Child, who was born at Christmas.

How did the people know that?

Because of the big bright star that shone over a stable where he was born. It was to show the way for all the people to go see Him.

Did they, Mommy?

No, not all of them. You see, He was born in a place where cows and sheep stayed, like a barn.

Why?

Well, because God wanted His son to save everybody, and He couldn't have done that if He had been someone like a king's son; so He had to be poor.

Why didn't everybody come to see Him?

Some of them didn't want to be friends with God anymore.

They didn't?

No, they were very bad and ungrateful—just think, the Christ Child was God's gift to them on the first Christmas.

He was?

Yes, he was. But a lot of people were glad he came, and they went to see Him. Some of them took presents to him, too. That's why we give presents: we remember that it is the Christ Child's birthday.

I wish He was coming this year, 'stead of 'way back then. I want Him to have a present now, too.

That's good of you, dear. But even though He is no longer on earth, He still likes to be remembered. So you think of Him tomorrow, and all the other little children in the world. Even today, some of them are born in stables too, and they don't get toys on Christmas day.

Why not?

Because their parents don't have a big, warm house and lots to eat like you do.

But I want them to have toys too. Can I give them some of mine? It's the Christ Child's birthday.

Yes, if you'd like. God bless you, darling. Good night.

Good night, Mommy.

## Christmas Parties

*That little brain of mine is filled with pain,  
And yet I will not admit it.  
Though I hold the glass quite firm in my hand  
I'm looking for a place to set it.  
Parties are parties, and fun is fun.  
But if I don't leave soon, I fear I'll be done.  
One was enough, four was too many.  
My poor old tummy wishes that there hadn't been any.  
To gin and punch I can't say no.  
To egg nog I say, "Don't pour too slow."  
Go ahead, little one, to me no one can tell  
That in a very few hours, I'll not feel so well.*

—Madge Hill

## Christmas Spirit

*The crisp, crunchy sound under a child's small feet . . .  
The aroma of freshly popped corn on a chilled winter's night . . .  
A blazing fire place where stockings are hung . . .  
Heat steamed windows adorned in wreaths and bells . . .  
Pine-scented livingrooms as decorating begins . . .  
A golden-brown turkey and cranberry sauce with pumpkin pie to make  
the meal complete . . .  
Tinkling icicles slowly dripping in the warm sun rays . . .  
Fat snow-men with coal button eyes and carrot noses . . .  
A vision of Santa from a sleepy-headed child . . .  
And among all this brightness of vermillion and green,  
Sits Christmas Spirit in her velvet cloak serene.*

—D. Chitwood

Christmas: 364 days of saving; 1 day of spending.



# Christmas Eve in Korea

By JEAN THRASHER

The blue fog swirls over the road that is now churned to a muddy slush by the ceaseless tramp of feet. A tree stands out naked amidst the seething powder of falling snow. Three dim figures appear through the mist.

"Say, you two, let's hold up a bit. My feet are almost frozen stiff."

The three men hobble to the side of the road. Hank and Dick sit wearily under the tree and huddle deeper into their khaki parkas while Marty hangs their guns on a low limb. He, settling down beside them, voices a low sigh.

"I sure wish I were settin' in front of the fireplace in the kitchen. The kitchen is so nice and warm—the warmest room in the house. About this time o' Christmas Eve the turkey in the oven begins to smell real fine. Sorta gives ya a funny feelin' in the pit of ya stomach when ya thinks of the turkey and dressin' and mince meat pie just settin' on the table kinda lonely-like.



"Course we don't go in for all those fancy decorations like most folks, but we always has a pine saplin' and a few tinsel balls. We always put a big silver star on top.

"On Christmas Eve 'bout this time Pa's rockin' in his big black chair. He jest rocks and stares into the fire—thinking' I s'pose. After a little bit ya'll see him take his briar pipe out of his mouth and

knock it out on the hearth. Then he settles back, and before ya know it he's asleep.

"'Bout an hour later Ma comes over and sets in the straight chair by the window. She jest looks outside across the fields. I don't know what she sees, but it jest don't seem like Christmas without Ma lookin' out the window, Pa snorin' in his rocker, and the good smell of turkey comin' from the oven.

"Gosh, it's cold out here!"



Marty rubs his hands across his boyish face, that is stinging from the bitter wind. Hank hunts for a match in his pocket, and after several attempts he succeeds in lighting his cigarette. The tiny glow seems to make them all warmer. Dick reaches over to take a drag and then leans back against the trunk of the tree in deep thought.

"You know, when I think of Christmas Eve, I can see Billy's face as he sits in front of the big tree in the living room with his eyes as big as moons. There's something different about a child at Christmas. It's as though it were the one time of the year that belongs just to them. When Billy looks at the manger scene under the tree, I feel like a stranger sharing his wonder. He doesn't try to tear up things like lots of other kids. He's a good boy. Billy is four now; I showed you his picture.

"I hope Maud gets Dad to dress up as Santa for Billy this year since I won't be there.

"One thing that kind of gets me at Christmas is hearing the carolers in the street. Of course, it doesn't snow where I live, but somehow without the snow it seems right to hear a group of young people singing outside on Christmas Eve.

"After Billy is in bed, Maud, Dad, and I sit around in the living room and drink cocoa. About eleven we get the presents together and put them under the tree. We always fill Billy's stocking with candy and fruit at Christmas. My parents always gave me fruit. It's a nice custom.

"Maud will be looking in to see if Billy's asleep now. I asked her to get him a new tricycle. I hope she did. I don't want him to have any guns or toys like that.

"I surely would like to be home to see his face tomorrow morning. There's just something different about a child's face at Christmas."

Hank stretches his long arms over his head, and then he folds them behind his neck to pillow his head.

"Dorothy and I always go to church on Christmas Eve. Dorothy's the girl I'm pinned to. She's a cute little blonde thing with bright gray eyes and a pug nose. After church we get together with several other couples and go over to Dorothy's house to decorate the tree.

"Dorothy's folks have big holly wreaths in the windows. It's so nice to come in out of the cold snow into a warm room. Their tree is usually seven feet tall, and all the silver bells and lights are laid out on the floor all ready for us. When all the tinsel is on the tree, I stand on a ladder and put a white angel on top. Then Dorothy's mother brings out coffee and fruit cake. We just sit around and talk for a while, and later Dorothy reads the 'Christmas Carol'. I like to hear that story at Christmas. It starts you to thinking.

"We gather around the piano and sing while Dorothy plays. I hope she's got a bunch of kids at her house now. She always has had a group over to her house to sing carols on Christmas Eve."

Dick stands and stamps the snow off his feet.



"Let's be hitting the road. We should get to the field station soon if we get a move on."

Marty and Hank stand up and get their guns off the limb. They begin trudging down the muddy road. Dick starts to hum "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem." Soon they are all singing.

"Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie."

The fog swirls around the three khaki-clad figures, and they disappear through the mist.

"Yet in thy dark street shineth the everlasting light The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. . ."



It's not what he gives me; it's how much he spends that counts.

# The Christmas Angel

By PATSY ANN DAVISON

Nancy Ann, sitting posed on the green leather chair gave the impression that the littlest angel had escaped from her heavenly abode. It was as if some master potter had taken the thinnest china and formed this delicate creature—the long golden curls, the round dimpled cheeks, and soft blue eyes covered by sweeping lashes. Her dainty hands rested amid the folds of her brown velvet dress, and her small legs extended straight out with only her black patent leather shoes dangling from the edge. But it was her small puckered mouth which gave one an insight into Nancy's thoughts. In a few minutes she was to go with her parents to Aunt Margaret's house for the family Christmas party. Everyone would be there, she knew, and it would be the same as last year. Uncle Raymond's loud voice and Santa Claus costume would greet them at the front door. He would pick her up and run into the decorated front-room yelling, "Just look who we have here." The older people would sit around and talk about the old times while she would be patted, kissed and told how much she had grown. Aunt Madeline, the wrinkled old lady, would insist in her high voice that her favorite niece recite the much rehearsed Christmas poem. Nancy knew that she would soon grow tired of the music and laughter, but her parents would be the very last to leave. They always gave her a picture book and one of the colorful dainties to keep her busy. Nancy Ann thought that she had much rather go over to her best friend, Sara Ann's, house and play. They had never finished that game of robbers because supper-time interrupted.

Nancy Ann started to leave the green leather chair but then noticed once again the tall Christmas tree. She and her father had picked it out only yesterday and last night they had decorated it. There it stood—covered by white cotton snow, ginger-bread men, shining lights and topped by a silver star. But there were no presents under the tree, for Santa Claus would not come until the next night. Nancy so looked forward to Christmas morning when she could at last rush downstairs and find all the presents. She thought of the beautiful gypsy doll she had seen in the store window. Her mother had said that only a very sweet girl would deserve such a nice present and so Nancy had tried to be just that. For a week now, despite rainy weather which kept her inside, she had helped keep the house clean. This indeed was very difficult for a little girl who enjoyed turning the house into a ranch house, a prison, or a hide-out to fit the game. She had even practiced the piano every day, but tonight she did not want to go to the Christmas party.

Still thinking of the beautiful gypsy doll, Nancy Ann climbed back upon the green leather chair, folded her hands and once again became the Christmas angel.



# There Comes A Time

By JODY MANN

Christmas always hits New York like an atom bomb explosion. You know, everybody just seems to burst out laughing and happy with—well, I guess you could call it “peace-goodwill”. The bomb had dropped for another reason just the other day. Thanksgiving it was, and Macy’s big parade down Broadway had brought out the whole town—just as if folks had never seen it before. Course they had—every single year, but it did seem like the balloons got bigger and more fabulous every time. The crowds never noticed the rain either that started plummeting down on the paraders. It was still falling stubbornly three days later on Meg Cameron as she sank with the groceries into the door of the Brooklyn boarding house. Poking a gloved hand into the mail box marked 8-A, she drew out three—just three?—no, four—all four fat brown envelopes. Impatiently she tapped them against the mail box, and glanced up the stairs at room 8-A.

“Now what? This is the last straw, Nina. From now on, I’m telling you—well—” She trudged slowly up the stairs, and kicked open the door. Nina was slumped over the typewriter as usual, but her eyes were fixed on the rain streaming in crooked rivulets down the window, and her hands were crammed into the pockets of an old plaid mackinaw—Meg’s. She turned around.

“Hi. Well, come on in, and shut the door. There’s a draft outside, you know.”

Meg stared at her a moment wondering how to go about this. It wasn’t going to be easy. Sure wasn’t. Huh — there was Nina — crazy Nina — leaning placidly against the wall, just looking at the typewriter as though mental telepathy by itself could pound out a story on the empty white page. Seemed like it was always that way now. Nina couldn’t

write anymore. Inspiration was a thing of the past. Yeah—and now the last four attempts at a pay check had come back today in the brown envelopes with little pink slips inside. Even Meg knew now what the slips would say before she read them. Nina had the top bureau drawer full of neat little stacks—these from *New Yorker*, and these from *Post*, and *Colliers*, and *Harpers* and how many others?—neat little piles of pink and white. No, Nina didn’t click. Not with a typewriter anyway. It couldn’t go on.

“Hello, Nina. Having any success?” Meg looked pointedly at the blank sheet in the typewriter, and without waiting for an answer, moved on to deposit the groceries in the kitchenette. It was one of the two rooms they occupied, and both could get in standing sideways. They seldom forced the squeeze. Meg gripped the brown envelopes behind her back, took a deep breath for the struggle, and whirled on Nina.

“Turn on the lights, Nina. It’s getting dark.”





"There aren't any light."

"You're joking, of course?"

"Nope. Not this time. The bill's overdue. This motheaten mackinaw's not too good a substitute for gas either."

"Well, why don't you put a quarter in the meter? You *can* pay that!"

"Don't be funny, Meg. I haven't got a cent. A check ought to come in a couple of days. You can feed it quarters till then."

Meg glared for a moment. "The check won't be coming, Nina. Here. Throw these in the fire where the last forty went." The brown envelopes slid across the table top—all of four of them. "What's happened to you Nina? You used to sell at least enough to live on. In the last six months you've gone off the bat. Don't ask me why? I'm just a working girl without all the fancy college degrees. I can't figure out your satyr, or satire, or whatever you call it, but it isn't right. If it was, you'd get checks instead of your own stuff back in the mail!"

Nina had been staring helplessly, tired at the hateful rejections, listening at the same time to Meg stomping back and forth from the bed to the kitchen door. There were only several feet to pace and let off steam. The four poster bed filled half the room, and the rest was diminished by a squat-legged highboy, a cardboard closet, a miserable gas heater, a bureau, and Nina's work table. But Meg was putting the few feet to good use. "Is that all you've got to say, Meg?"

"No. No, it's not. Now see here, Nina—." Meg stopped pacing and leaned across the work table. "I'm your friend. I've been your friend since you moved in ten months ago."

"Eleven."

"Well, eleven, and I'm the last one on God's green earth that wants to stop your climbing to success, but I just can't keep you alive while you're doing it. Macy's don't pay me that much. Don't you see, Nina? I buy the groceries—I pay the bills—I've even used up my savings—well, say something!"

But Nina didn't. She just poked around in an ashtray, picked up the longest cigarette butt, and lit it.

"Listen, Nina, I don't know why the money's not coming—"

"I can't write at Christmas—that's why. Nothing comes out right. I sit down, and I can't think—just like this, like today." She ripped the empty page from the typewriter, smashed it with both fists, and slung it across the room. "It happens to every damn writer, Meg. You wouldn't understand. I just can't write now. For God's sake, leave me alone!"

"What's wrong, Nina? You can tell me. Something's happened to get you this way—it must have. Let me help. You can't go through Christmas like this."

"Why not? I hate Christmas!"

"Nina!" Meg could have sworn lightning struck. She sat down on the feather mattress, horrified. "You can't be serious?"



"Sure I am. I do hate it. Everything about it. It's child's play. It's foolishness. It's all hokum. Sure, I sit and laugh every December watching merry humanity dash about in the sleet and snow like perfect asses—"

"Nina!"

"Yeah. You're one of 'em, aren't you, Meg? Getting your ribs cracked in a subway mob, and loving it. Trotting merrily down the avenue when the weather's 20 below—taking consumption, and singing God Rest You Merry Gentlemen! They need resting and God knows it."

"Please! Don't say no-no more. I don't want to hear it. Besides I-I can't understand it. It's just like what you write. You're looney, Nina!"

"Maybe."

Meg's thoughts whirled in confusion.—Dear Father! I don't believe her. God rest you—oh! What was I saying? I can't think what I was saying. Christmas. Money—money, that was it.—

"Something's got to be done, Nina. Hate Christmas if you want to, but it isn't buying my Ma the new shoes she needs, and it won't put quarters in the gas meter! You gotta go to work. I told Mr. Jennings I was bringing you in if the checks didn't come, and they didn't. Macy's is a good place to work. They treat you real nice and—"

"Me—work at Macy's? I'd rather dig graves! Can't you just see me now—'May I wait on you, please?'"

"You won't have to do that, Nina. The crowd just shoves a million things in your hands, and you write up tickets. You won't have time to think."

"It sounds charming. You'll never get me—"

"Either that, Nina, or out of here. I'm going broke, and I don't owe it to you. I can't live two lives at once, but I can live mine, and do a good job of it—alone. The light'll stay on too, and I can put something besides limburger cheese in my stomach. It's your neck—take your choice."

Nina walked to the window, and stared out. It was still raining, and the street light on the corner looked blurred in the fog. Her shoulders slumped under the mackinaw.

"Okay, Meg. You win."

Meg sighed with fatigue. She found candles in the kitchen cabinet, pitched them to Nina, and started out the door.

"Where's you going?"

"Thought maybe Popper's would give us more stovewood on credit." The door shut, and Meg's footsteps were swallowed by the pounding of the rain.

Nina didn't light the candles. For a long time she paced the floor from kitchen to bed like Meg had done, painfully conscious of the dank cold seeping in at the window ledge. It settled even under the heavy mackinaw. She glared at the black gas meter perched insolently on the wall by the kitchen door.

"You damn little box! You've got to have a quarter, so Nina Barlowe's got to work at Macy's to make you one. Funny, huh? I came to New York



to write, not peddle kiddy-cars, but what do I do?—peddle kiddy-cars. Me—third honor graduate with an A.B. in journalism. That's a rook. What was it the commencement speaker said—the world at her fingertips, the presses at her feet. Yeah. He lied. Meg's thinking that too. I'm the only one that won't admit it. Okay—okay—I can't write! I'm all washed up! The damn copyreader at New Yorker keeps telling me my stuff gets worse and worse, and he's right. God, what's wrong with me? I can't slip backwards now. I've come too far. Macy's—a pack of ignorant fools grinning like toothpaste ads—and Christmas! You're a good kid, Meg. You just don't understand. Your life's so simple, uncomplicated. You think mine is too except for this. I know. I've got you disillusioned, Meg. Dad is a doctor, but not the kind you think. His patients are farmers—every one of 'em—and their crops don't make enough to pay the bills. I worked my way through the university, Meg, just like a slave. You should have been with me that first year. You'd have known what it was like. Hell, that's what—but I made ends meet—until Christmas. I had to buy a present, Meg, a high-priced present for my roommate, because the gang was having a party to exchange them. It was a big affair—too big for me. I knew what they were buying—cigarette cases, expensive bracelets. I couldn't do it, Meg, and I could have explained to Bert, but not the whole crowd! They'd have pitied me, laughed behind my back—probably even tried to lend me money. I never forgot that party. It tore out of me every shred of pride I ever had, and they did it! Yeah, those mercenary cats were born on silver dollars, and I had to get even—had to have respect. So I hit the books I studied like a maniac, and four years later—yeah, they were the millionaires, still stupid as hell. Nina Barlowe was the genius headed for big time!”

Nine flung herself across the bed, and pressed the cold pillow to her face. A knife-like pain was shooting down the back of her head, and her throat felt raw.

“God, what am I saying? I can't crack up like this. I gotta calm down. Sure, Meg's right about everything. She's a good kid. I'd be starving without her, and I can't tell her what she's doing to me—driving me backwards. She'd look down on me too, and pity me. God, I'll have to go to Macy's.”

When Meg returned with the kindling wood, she found Nina huddled in a knot on the bed, soundlessly sleeping. The candles had not been touched.

\* \* \*

Macy's was a madhouse. The wildly rushing merry-makers pressed from front to rear and back again at a snail's pace, lacking the room to do otherwise. Fat women gawked at the compelling advertisement swinging above the girdle counter, investigated, and failing to find a bargain, moved on to the candy pan. A cherubic looking papier-mache angel dangled from the ceiling just inside the 34th St. entrance. It made a two foot flight through the air every time a new busload of customers let in a blast of wind through the door. The escalator shafts dripped with shimmering paper icicles, and Santa Claus sat grinning in his sleigh suspended above the glove counter.



He was cracking his whip over Comet's head that almost bumped a ceiling light. They didn't seem to be making much progress. Occasionally the din of voices subsided enough to make audible concealed bells tolling out Silent Night, and a score of kids crying vainly for "Mommy" who had seen something on another counter for 98c instead of \$1. The perfume fountain was almost conquered by the leaden atmosphere that reeked of salted peanuts, tobacco smoke, and garlic. All was light-hearted confusion.

Nina found herself stationed alone behind an electric train platform in the dire midst of Toyland. Everybody wanted the same thing, and that was "clerk! clerk!"

"God, for the peace of Brooklyn!" Nina closed her eyes to say some magic word.

"Clerk! Oh, clerk!"

"Saint Christopher! She's calling me!"

"Clerk! Oh, miss, I have lost a stone out of my ring! Won't you please help me find it?"

Nine eyed the injured jewel, obviously the pride of the 5&10, and groaned. "Where did you lose it?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know, but I must find it. My Gus has given it to me. Oh! Oh!"

Nina followed the unhappy woman to the edge of Toyland, and collided promptly with Mr. Jennings, department manager. He embarked upon a lecture that had been delivered so many times, it sounded like a ritual.

"Now, Miss Barton—"

"Barlowe."

"Ah, yes. Now, Miss Barlowe, Macy's department store has as its foremost policy keeping the employees happy so that indirectly the customers will receive superior and more genial—ahem—service."

"Yes-s, Mr. Jennings. I was told that verbatim when I arrived this morning."

"That ver-which?"

"Verbatim—that means with all politeness."

"Ah, yes. Macy's is always the model of politeness. The point is, Miss Barton—"

"Barlowe."

"The point is, Miss Barlowe, it is deemed necessary, it is absolutely required that—"

"That I stay where I was put."

"That you—why, how did you know?"

"Really, Mr. Jennings, you've been pointing to the electric trains for the last ten minutes. Very well, sir. I shall hitherto remain put."

Nina stalked contemptuously away with a "searching for something" look on her face to ward off customers. The train counter was almost a sanctuary compared with the rest of the place. Momentarily it was a deserted island in the shark infested sea. Nina's ticket book contained the report of two sales amounting to \$100. She pushed it further back on the shelf.



"Damn shame. \$100 thrown away on toy trains just to retell a lie to kids. They'll both be smashed in six month's time, and what'll be the good of it? It's a damn fact you can't eat trains, or stick 'em in a gas meter."

Nina was about to escape on relief when an anguished wail startled her. That fake Santa Claus was roaring with laughter that sounded genuine, and pushing his way through the crowd with a squirming little ruffian in his arms. They were almost to the train platform when Nina saw the mother. Her black eyes peered anxiously at the man whose huge arms almost enveloped her son. Nina saw her bite her lip.

"There it is, Santa! See it! See it! I want to see it run on the tracks—Santa, make the whistle blow! Gee whiz! I like trains, Santa!"

"Say you do, huh? Well-I-I, old Santa Clause makes 'em for little boys just like you—if they're good."

"Oh-h, I'm a good boy, Santa. Really I am. Will the lady let me run it, huh, will she?"

"Well, I don't know. Why don't you ask her?" That over-stuffed man was winking at Nina, and nodding, and the kid stretched out his thin arms to her. There was nothing to do but take him and try to ignore his shrieks. That ridiculous Santa was enjoying her plight, but the poor mother was not.

"Butchie!—Butchie! Let's go look at the dump trucks. Maybe Santa Claus will bring you a dump truck. I saw a big shiny red one over yonder. Hear, Butchie?"

"No, Mommy. I want a train." His shrieks had died away into silent, wide-eyed wonder. "Can I make the whistle blow, lady?"

"Butchie, let's go look at the pop guns—let's go—oh, mister, please get him away from the trains! He don't need a train. He's—he's got one at home. Here, lady, I'll take him. Give him to me."

Nina was glad to. The kid wasn't too helpful to the hair-do, and he was keeping her from going to lunch. She straightened her blouse, and left without a backward glance at Santa Claus. He was watching Butchie being dragged away—sobbing.

Macy's had closed for the night, and maids were restoring aisles and counters to order for tomorrow's storm. Nina was leaning exhausted against the wall by the Broadway door, waiting for Meg, when a hand was stuck in her face.

"Cigarette?"

"Thanks."

"You shouldn't ought to tease Jennings like that, you know."

"Really. What were you doing listening? Who are you?"

"Santa Claus."

"Yeah, and I'm Eleanor Roosevelt. Glad to know you."

"He raised one eyebrow. "Have you already forgotten Butchie, Miss Barlowe?"

"Oh, yes. Butchie. So you are old Santa?"

"Otherwise known as Mitchell Sampson. You're a case for the files, did



you know it, Miss Barlowe?"

"I'm afraid I don't follow you."

"You remind me of a lawyer I knew once that tried to win a case with sarcasm. He lost. People make me curious, so I did a long study on him, and clapped him in my files."

"And now you're going to study me."

"I'd like to."

Meg picked this moment to come bounding down the escalator. "Let's go home, Nina. I'm beat. Well, hi, Mitch. Nina done somethin' to need a lawyer, or are you just wolfing? They must have put you in Toyland, honey."

"Yeah, trains. So you're a lawyer, not Santa Claus, Mr. Sampson?"

"Not yet. I'm part time Santa Claus till I can pay the next quarter's tuition. Are you by any chance doing anything tonight?"

"Yes, working."

"She writes satire. Now we know all about each other. Ain't that ducky?" Meg grinned like an imp.

Nina wondered if Mitchell Sampson was mentally taking notes. She decided he'd had enough. "Let's go, Meg, and get the train ride over."

"Okay. Bye, Mitch."

He answered her, but looked straight at Nina. "See you tomorrow—Miss Barlowe?"

"Yes?"

"You don't give a damn if Butchie doesn't get his train, do you?"

"Why should I? Come on, Meg."

Nina gradually got used to the excitement, and cheerful abandon of the shoppers. And they grew more animated as December wore on. She got used to gritting her teeth until she could straggle home and take it out on the typewriter. Meg didn't understand.

"Why don't you relax, and give Mitch a chance, Nina? I know he hangs around you all the time. He tells me he does."

"You been talking about me?"

"Well, yeah—some. Mitch is okay. He could help you."

"I don't need help, Meg. I just want to write, and I've got to do that by myself. I've finished a couple in the last two weeks."

"I know, Nina, but look what they are—Christmas is a fake.—How far do you think that will go? It's no good. What do you want to do—tear the world apart?"

"Yeah, I know. Lay off, will you, Meg?"

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry. Mitch told me about Butchie. Said the little tyke comes to Toyland nearly every day. Climbs up on his knee, and says, 'You're gonna bring me a train, aren't you, Santa?'"

Nina didn't look up from the typewriter, and Meg went on. "Poor kid. Mitch says he doesn't think his mother can afford it."

"She can't. I've seen that look on other faces a million times. They've got to, and they can't. Nice, isn't it? Yeah, Butchie came back today without



mother. Played with that \$50 train for a century. I couldn't figure it out. Mother was there, though, and when she found him, it wasn't Butchie that cried."

"Gee, Nina."

"See what I mean, Meg? Now tell me about your Christmas spirit. I'm listening."

"You're all wrong, Nina—you're all wrong." Meg left her alone to pound into the middle of the night. "I'll tell Mitch, that's what I'll do. He'll figure something out."

Snow fell that night, and New York was blanketed with the first promise of a white Christmas. Nina eyed it with indifference, and pushed on through the door flashing her pass card. Meg was humming Jingle Bells.

"This'll be a trying day, you know. Nobody shops on the twenty-fourth except folks that forgot somebody, and they're always out of sorts. Well, so long. I'll meet you at closing time—and Nina—"

"Uh-huh."

"Give Mitch a break."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, Meg?"

She nodded. "So would Santa Claus. He might even come to see you."

"I might have known. Hurry, or you'll be late."

At five o'clock, Mitch had yet to visit the electric trains. Santa Claus' throne was vacant, and Toyland was beginning to resemble the Deserted Village. The quiet was so dense Nina couldn't stand it. She flipped the switch on the \$50 train, gave it a shove, and became engrossed in loading the log car, and unbuckling the caboose that she didn't hear Mitch.

"Hi."

"Well, hello, Mr. Sampson. Where's you been?"

"Out—attending to a little business. Why?"

"I just won—look by the post, Mitch. Butchie's mother."

"Uh-huh, and no Butch. She must have lost him again."

But the woman did not turn away after scanning the aisles. She walked haltingly toward them, and Nina stared.

"God—she looks like an old woman!"

"I'll make a bet with you she's stronger than you think. Accept?"

Nina didn't have time to answer.

"Pl—please don't let me bother you, sir—mama'm. I just want to buy that little dump truck. I-I mean I can't—I'm j-just looking."

"You haven't lost Butchie again?" Nina's voice was mocking but the woman didn't notice.

"Oh, no. I made him stay home today because I—well, I didn't want him up here. I just can't stand to see him get so happy looking at the train. You know, he thinks it'll be there—right there under the tree in the morning. You don't know how hard I tried to tell him, but you just can't—can't tell a kid—specially one that's good as gold like my Butchie—that Santa just can't hear him."



"Very hard. I know." Nina's mouth was set in a grim line, and Mitch saw it.

"Yes'm, fifty dollars is more money than I ever had at one time. Butchie's young though—awful young. He'll forget about the train—after a l-little, and play real nice with the dump truck. Here's the money, ma'am. I want the littlest red one. He'll have his train next year. I've made up my mind. Well—you folks have been awful kind. Butchie likes you. I'll go home to him now."

"Write a ticket for the train, Nina. We'll have it sent out." Mitch was digging in his pocket.

"Are you kiddin'?" Nina looked from Mitch to the woman's white face.

"Write the ticket. Santa told Butch that train'd be under his tree, and he sent me the money for it."

"Oh, but s-sir, s-sir! I can't take your money. It j-just—I-I—"

Mitch put one arm around the woman's shoulders. They were shaking almost like a chill. "Just between you and me, Butch is a swell fellow. He needs a train—don't you think?"

Nina, too astonished to do otherwise, filled out the bill of sale.

"God bless you, s-sir! Oh, God bless you, ma'am! God bless you! God bless you! She hurried down the aisle, stopped and turned. "A-A Merry Christmas to you!"

Mitch called back, and laughed as the woman scurried through the store shouting "God bless you" to every last straggling customer. He took a deep breath. "Well, time to lock up."

Nina hadn't moved. "Mitch."

"Yes."

"Why did you do that? Why should you do that?"

"I wanted to, Nina."

"But you haven't got fifty dollars to spare. I know you haven't. You've got to have it to pay your tuition."

Mitch put the money bag down and took her hand in both of his. "There are times, my little girl, when big things lose their significance, when a strong desire is overwhelmed by one stronger. Sure, I need the money, but not half as much as Butchie needs that train. I'll get through school none the worse off for waiting another quarter. The waiting doesn't make me lose faith, but it might do just that to Butchie."

"I don't understand you, Mitch"

"Then do this—for me. Be guided by your heart instead of your head just once. Christmas can do that for you. It's when the understanding in people wants to come out. And you know something else?"

"What?"

"It can only be held in by force. I'm not an idealist, Nina. Christmas can't come in gold coins to every soul on earth. I know that, but you see, you can make of Christmas what you will. All this stuff that meets the eye's just superficial. You can't see the real Christmas, honey. It comes from down here—inside."



"Yeah, Mitch? I guess I—tell Mig I've gone home. I'll—see you."

The hand that slipped from Mitch's was wet and clammy. He started to follow her—but he didn't.

When Meg came bounding up the steps of the boarding house, she heard the typewriter again.

"Nina! Is anything wrong? Why did you leave me? Gee whiz, are you writing again?"

"Hi, Meg," but she offered no information, slowing up only to back space and cover up mistakes.

"Saint Christopher! Are you writing a book—11-12-13 pages already?" Meg picked up the script, and started for the kitchen. She got as far as the gas heater.

"Huh?—There comes a time in the life of a woman when she loses faith in herself, when she turns the time of human relations by blind selfishness into chaos. This is the story of a woman who lost, and found that she couldn't regain alone.—Nina! You've done it!"

Five weeks later, Mitchell Sampson got off the subway at a Brooklyn station, straightened his tie, and walked briskly toward the boarding house. He pulled the letter from his pocket again, and read:

Well, Mitch, you can close my case in your file now. Mission completed successfully. All I can is 'thanks'. If you want to know more, read it in the April Cosmopolitan. In case you might need it—here's \$50, my debt to Butchie. There was no signature.

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## Story of a Star

Once upon a time there was a star. It was not a very big star, nor a very bright one. In fact, it was one of the smallest stars in all the sky, and, I regret to say, did not always shine as brightly as it might. For, you see, this little star was ashamed because he was not like the other stars.

He looked about him at the proud host, twinkling red and green and yellow and vying with each other for the highest place in the sky. But the little star never dared to show his face near any of the others for fear of being ridiculed. Oh, he could shine just as brightly and as radiantly as they—he knew, because once when he was feeling particularly blue and lonely, he had gone off by himself to a dark, desolate valley and there he had shone with all his might until the whole glade was as bright as day. Then from a solitary hut in the little valley, he heard a child's voice saying: "Mother, come look at the beautiful star! It's bright as the sun and it's right up over the fig trees." The star twinkled happily at these words, and the voice continued: "But, mother, it's such a funny looking star. It hasn't got enough points."

Alas, when he heard these too familiar words, the little star stopped his



shining at once and hurried away to hide in a deep, dark cloud and weep. For it was true—he didn't have enough points. Everyone knew that stars had five points, that is, except for a few venerable ones which had six. But this little star had only four points, the only star in all the universe with just four points. It was whispered among some of the moonbeams that he didn't even look like a star. And whenever he appeared, the other stars turned away and exchanged knowing glances.

All this made the little star exceedingly sad. He would hide behind the clouds and come out only in the daytime when all the other stars were asleep.

Then one night wonderful news spread through all the heavens. The Creator had summoned all the stars to appear before Him in order that one might be selected to be sent as a sign unto men to announce the birth of the Christ-child.

Never had the heavens seen such activity. All day long no one slept. There was such rubbing and buffing, shining and polishing that the sun itself was almost outdone.

As soon as the last sunbeam slipped out of sight over the rim of the sea, all the stars in heaven began arranging themselves before the reviewing platform. There was much confusion, each one pushing and shoving, trying to get closest to the center so that his brilliance might be seen above the others. Then angels were flying about everywhere arranging the procession in orderly ranks.

Dazzled by all the splendor, the little star came out from behind his cloud to gaze upon the magnificent array, and was so overcome that he forgot himself. He drew nearer and nearer, until with great horror, he found that he was being shepherded into the procession. There he was right in the midst of the brightest stars of heaven; escape was impossible.

The little star was so frightened and ashamed that he tried to hide behind one of his glittering neighbors, but the bright light only showed him up more clearly. In despair he began to weep. At least no one laughed at him now, for they were all too busy preening themselves to look at anyone else. All he could do was hide his face and hope he wouldn't be seen by the Great Reviewer.

Slowly and majestically the line began to move. The beautiful stars were twinkling with all their might. Never had there been such a spectacle in the sky. The angels urged them on, but the stars, determined to be seen by their Creator, moved very slowly. That is, except for the little star. When he came before the throne, he tried to slip by under the shadows of the star in front of him.

Then it happened. In his shame and anxiety the little star tripped on a bit of star-dust and fell sprawling before the throne. He picked himself up and, though shaking with sobs, turned to slip back into line as quickly and quietly as possible. But just at that instant a voice was heard.

"Let the procession cease."

There was a great and ominous silence as the little star felt all eyes

upon him. Oh, how he wished he had stayed safe and unseen in his cloud. Now he could do nothing but weep.

The voice continued: "This star will I send as a sign unto the world. Its four points represent the four corners of the earth from whence men shall come to worship my Son and to kneel before Him."

The angel chorus burst into joyful song. The little star feeling pride rising in his heart glowed brighter and brighter as the angels, singing and praising God, led him to a small stable over which he shone proudly throughout the night.

And it was with great joy that he heard the voices of men saying, "See the wonderful star over Bethlehem. Surely this is the sign which has been promised to us. This night the Christ is born. Let us go and fall down before Him and worship Him."

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Merry Christmas to all and to all happy holidays!